

# ST. NICHOLAS HOSPITAL HEALTHSOURCE

## Hiatal Hernia

A hiatal hernia is a condition in which part of the stomach protrudes through the diaphragm from the abdomen into the chest. Hiatal hernias are common and generally do not cause problems.

While the cause of hiatal hernias is not known, they seem to occur more often after middle age, in overweight people (especially women), and among smokers.

Many people with hiatal hernias never experience symptoms. However, in some people, stomach acid and digestive juices move up into the esophagus. This is called gastroesophageal reflux and can cause: heartburn, especially after eating large meals or when lying down; a bitter or sour taste in the back of the throat; bloating and belching; discomfort or pain in your stomach or esophagus; and/or vomiting.

If you are diagnosed with a hiatal hernia, your healthcare provider may recommend a change in your diet and/or suggest losing weight. He or she also may prescribe medication to buffer the acidity in your esophagus.

Individuals with hiatal hernias can ease their symptoms by taking the following steps:

- Follow the treatment recommended by your healthcare provider
- If you smoke, quit
- Eat three or four small meals a day instead of one or two large ones
- Don't eat 2 to 3 hours before you go to bed
- Avoid drinks containing caffeine (tea, coffee, cocoa, colas, etc.) or alcohol before you go to bed
- Elevate the head of your bed
- Wear clothes and belts that fit loose around your waist
- If you are overweight, try to lose weight



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